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## REMINISCENCES: MY FIRST PROCESSION IN LOS ANGELES, MARCH 16, 1847

BY STEPHEN C. FOSTER.

(Read before Historical Society, 1887. Read before Pioneer Society, 1902.)

The writer has witnessed forty celebrations of the 4th of July in this city, commencing with 1847, when he read the Declaration of Independence on Fort Hill, in Spanish, for the information of our newly-made fellow-citizens, who spoke only the Castilian tongue. As I marched in the procession the other day (July 4, 1887), I recalled the appearance of the city when I first knew it, so widely different from the present.

The outbreak of the Mexican War (May, 1846) found the writer at Oposura, Sonora, which place he reached December, 1845 on his way to California, by the way of Santa Fe and El Paso, from Missouri. The first news we had of the war was of the capture of Capt. Thornton's command of U. S. Dragoons by the Mexican cavalry, on the Rio Grande, and the people rang the bells for joy. But shortly after, we got the news of the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and they did not ring the bells then.

In June, 1846, arrived at Oposura, a small party of Americans headed by James Kennedy, a machinist from Lowell, Mass., who with his wife had come around Cape Horn, three years before, to the cotton manufactory at Horcasitas, Sonora; the husband to superintend the machinery, and the wife to teach the Mexican girls the management of the looms and spindles. As there was no chance to leave by sea, Kennedy had made up a party to see him safe through the Apache range to Santa Fe, where he expected to secure passage in the traders' wagons across the plains to Missouri, and I accompanied him; and after a hard, hot trip, we reached Santa Fe safely in July.

'August 18, 1846, I witnessed the entry of the American army, under General Kearney, into Santa Fe.

In 1845, the Mormons were driven out of Nauvoo, Ill., and, under the leadership of Brigham Young, took up their march

westwardly. Their first intention was to reach California, then occupied by a sparse Mexican population and a few hundred American emigrants. They stopped one season at Council Bluffs, to raise a crop and procure means for further progress. When the call was made for volunteers in Missouri, for service in New Mexico and California, none were willing to enlist as infantry, to make such long marches afoot, and Capt. James Allen, of the First U. S. Dragoons, was sent to Council Bluffs to try and raise a battalion of infantry, enlisted for twelve months, to be discharged in California. The order was given by Brigham, and within forty-eight hours five full companies (500 men) were raised and on their march to Fort Leavenworth. The conditions were, that they were to choose their company officers, but were to be commanded by an officer of the regular army, and were to receive army clothing at Fort Leavenworth. The Missouri troops furnished their own clothing, for which the Government paid each man \$29.50 a year.

So they started on their long march with their poorest clothing. When they reached the Fort they learned that the steamboat bringing their clothing and percussion muskets had been snagged in the Missouri, and everything was lost. Their commander, Capt. Allen, was taken sick and died. He had their confidence, and they objected to serving under another commander, and to start for California without the promised clothing; but the order was imperative to march, and the clothing could not be replaced in less than a month. So they sent to Brigham for advice, and he ordered them to push on, even if they had to reach California barefooted and in their shirt-tails. So, flint-lock muskets, of the pattern of 1820, were furnished them, and they reached Santa Fe under the command of Lieut. A. J. Smith, of the First Dragoons—the Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith of the Civil War. On their arrival at Santa Fe, Gen. Kearney ordered Capt. Cooke, of the 1st Dragoons, to command them, and Lieut. Smith went with them to California, to rejoin his company which had started a month before with Gen. Kearney. Lieut. (now Gov.) Stoneman, who had just graduated at West Point, also went with them.

Gen. Kearney had started with six companies of dragoons, but on the Rio Grande he met Kit Carson with dispatches for Washington, from Com. Stockton, announcing that California had been taken possession of, without resistance. So Kearney only took two companies, mounted on mules, with pack mules to convey their provisions, by way of the Gila River.

At Santa Fe mules were scarce, and money scarcer with the quartermaster, who also had to provide transportation for the 1st Missouri Cavalry, under Col. Doniphan, then starting on their famous march through Northern Mexico to Camargo, where their period of enlistment expired. But seventeen 6-mule teams, hauling sixty days' rations, could be spared for Cooke's command, and no wagon had ever crossed from the Rio Grande to California; so, a road had to be found and made as they went, after leaving the Rio Grande.

Kit Carson had accompanied Kearney as guide, and Pauline Weaver, the pioneer of Arizona, who had come with Carson from California, awaited Cooke. Five new Mexican guides were hired, all under command of Joaquin Leroux, an old trapper, who had trapped on every stream from the Yellowstone to the Gila.

I was then clerking in a store, waiting for something to turn up, when I was informed that an interpreter was wanted to accompany Cooke to California, and I went to Capt. McCusick, the quartermaster, with my recommendations. Enoch Barnes, who was killed in a drunken brawl at the Ballona, in this county, some twenty years ago, who drove a wagon across the plains in 1845, in the same caravan as myself, was also an applicant. McCusick was a prompt, stern man, and the competitive examination of the Yale graduate and the Missouri mule-whacker was short, and turned on transportation and money. I had a good mule, rifle and blanket, and as to money, I could wait until Uncle Sam was able to pay me, as long as my wages were running on and I got my rations. Barnes was just off a spree, in which he had drank and gambled off all his money, and pawned his rifle, and it would have cost \$100 to fit him out. So I won the appointment, and the contract was quickly drawn, that for \$75 a month and rations I was to serve as interpreter to California, furnish my own animal, clothing and arms. The contract was made October, 1846, and I served under it until May 17th, 1849, when the people of Los Angeles selected their Ayuntamiento, and the garrison evacuated the place, and the last seventeen months of my term I also acted as 1st Alcalde of the district of Los Angeles, without any extra compensation. On leaving the Rio Grande, I volunteered to join the guides, as there was nothing for me to do in camp, and we did not expect to pass through any Mexican settlements until we reached the Pima villages, on the Gila. Leroux's party, ten in number, started ahead, with six days' rations, on our riding animals, to

find a practicable route for wagons, and wood, and water, at such intervals as infantry could march—fifteen to twenty miles a day, in one case forty miles, between camps; one man to be sent back from each watering place to guide the command until our rations were expended, and then all to return to the command. We thus found our way by the Guadalupe Canyon and San Pedro River to Tucson, from which place there was a trail to the Pima villages, and from there to California. Weaver had just come over the road, and there was no difficulty in finding our way. We ate our last flour, bacon, sugar and coffee by January 14th, 1847, on the desert, between the Colorado and Warner's Pass. A supply of beef cattle met us at Carrizo Creek, on the west side of the desert, and we lived on beef alone until April, 1847, when supplies, brought from New York on the ships that brought Col. Stevenson's regiment, reached us at Los Angeles. At Gila Bend, we met two Mexicans, who told us of the outbreak that took place in Los Angeles, September, 1846; and at Indian Wells, on the desert, we met Leroux, who, with most of the guides, had been sent ahead from Gila Bend, to get assistance from the San Luis Indians, who had declared for the Americans, and held all the *ranchos* on the frontier; and he brought the news that Stockton and Kearney had marched from San Diego to retake Los Angeles. We pushed on by forced marches toward Los Angeles, and at Temecula received a letter, stating that Los Angeles was taken, that Kearney and Stockton had quarrelled about who was to command, and that Kearney had returned with his dragoons to San Diego, to which place we were ordered to proceed. Arriving there, together with the dragoons, we were ordered to San Luis Rey, where, from the Rancho of Santa Margarita, we procured beef, soap and candles, the only articles of rations the country could furnish. In a few days, fifty of the men were attacked with dysentery, and the surgeon said breadstuff of any kind would be of more use to check the disease than all his medicine. So the commissary and myself were ordered to Los Angeles, to try and get some flour. We found the town garrisoned by Fremont's Battalion, about 400 strong. They, too, had nothing but beef served out to them, but as the people had corn and beans for their own use, and by happening around at the houses about meal-time, they could occasionally get a square meal of tortillas y frijoles. Here we met Louis Roubideau, of the Jurupa Ranch, who said he could spare us some 2,000 or 3,000 pounds of wheat, which we could grind at a little mill he had

on the Santa Ana River. So, on our return, two wagons were sent to Jurupa, and they brought 1,700 pounds of unbolted wheat flour and two sacks of beans, a small supply for 400 men. I then messed with one of the captains, and we all agreed that it was the sweetest bread we ever tasted.

March 12th, 1847, we received important news in six weeks from Washington, overland. Stockton and Kearney had been relieved, and ordered East, and Com. Shubrick and Col. R. B. Mason were to take their places, and the military to command on land, and what was of far more interest to us, that Stevenson's ships were daily expected at San Francisco, and that we should soon have bread, sugar and coffee again, and we were ordered to Los Angeles to relieve Fremont's Battalion. So, with beautiful weather, and in the best of spirits, we began our march to the city of the Angels. Our last day's march was only ten miles, and we camped on the San Gabriel, at the Pico crossing, early, and all hands were soon busy preparing for the grand entree on the morrow. Those who had a shirt—and they were a minority—could be seen washing them, some bathing, some mending their ragged clothes, and as there was plenty of sand, all scouring their muskets till they shone again. We made an early start the next morning, and when we forded the Los Angeles River, at Old Aliso, now Macey street, there was not a single straggler behind. The order of march was, the dragoons in front. They had left Missouri before receiving their annual supply of clothing, and they presented a most dilapidated appearance, but their tattered caps and jackets gave them a somewhat soldierly appearance. They had burned their saddles and bridles after the fight at San Pascual, but a full supply of horses to remount them had been purchased of the late Don Juan Forster, and all the Mexican saddlers and blacksmiths in the country had been kept busy making saddles, bridles and spurs for them. Their officers were Capt. A. J. Smith, 1st Lieut. J. B. Davidson, 2nd Lieut. George Stoneman; then came four companies of the Iowa Infantry, Company B having been left to garrison San Diego. In all we numbered 300 muskets and 80 sabres. The line of march was by Aliso and Arcadia streets, to Main, and down Main to the Government House, where the St. Charles now stands, where the dragoons dismounted and took up their quarters. The infantry turned out of Main street past the house of John Temple, now Downey Block, and pitched their tents in the rear, where they remained until they were mustered out, June, 1847.

I have described the appearance of the dragoons, but cannot do justice to the infantry, only by saying it was Falstaff's ragged company multiplied by ten. The officers had managed to have each a decent suit of clothes, but they brought out in stronger contrast the rags of the rank and file. On Los Angeles street were some 300 or 400 Indians, the laborers in the vineyards, who had taken a holiday to witness our entry, while a group of about 100 women, with their heads covered by their rebosos, who had met at the funeral of the mother of the late Don Tomas Sanchez, ex-Sheriff of the county, stood looking at the ragged gringos as they marched by. On Main street were some thirty or forty Californians, well dressed in their short jackets and breeches with silver buttons, open at the sides showing the snow-white linen beneath. I noticed they looked with most interest at the dragoons, so many of whose comrades had fallen before their lances at San Pascual that cold December morning, and lay buried in that long grave, or lay groaning in the hospital at San Diego. We had no wavng flags, but waving rags, and many a one; nor brass bands, only a solitary snare drum and fife, played by a tall Vermont fifer, and a stout, rosy-cheeked English drummer; and they struck up the "Star Spangled Banner" as we passed the Government House, and kept it up until orders were given to break ranks and stack arms. And then came a loud hurrah from all that ragged soldiery. Their long and weary march over mountains, plain and desert, of 2,200 miles, was over.

I will now describe two individuals who marched in that procession. One is the writer. 'Tis nearly forty years ago, and I was a younger and a better-looking man than I am now. I had left Santa Fe with only the clothes on my back, and a single change of under-clothing. I had been paid off at San Lus Rey, and had \$200 in my pocket, and I tried to find some clothing in Los Angeles on my first visit, but could find none. So, I rode to San Diego, and through the kindness of a friendly man-of-war's man I got a sailor's blue blouse, a pair of marine's pants and brogans, for which I paid \$20. My place in the column, as interpreter, was with the colonel, at the head, and I rode with my rifle slung across the saddle, powder-horn and bullet-pouch slung about my shoulders. My beard rivaled in length that of the old colonel by whose side I rode, but mine was as black as the raven's wing, and his was as grey as mine is now. But if I was not the best-looking, nor the best-dressed man, I was the best-mounted man on Main street that day.

When the horses were delivered for the dragoons, a young man named Ortega, a nephew of Don Pio Pico, rode an iron grey horse, with flowing mane and tail, and splendid action. I tried to buy him for the colonel, but he would not sell him. The day we left San Luis, I had mounted my mule, and was chatting with Ortega, admiring his horse, when he offered to sell him, and I could fix the price. I gave him \$25. The dragoon horses cost \$20 each. A few days after my arrival in this city, Lieut. Stoneman was ordered to scout with a party of dragoons towards San Bernardino, to look out for Indian horse thieves, and I sold the horse to him; and well the Governor remembers the gallant grey that bore him on many a long and weary scout.

I have thus described my appearance at my first public entry into this city, from no spirit of egotism, but only to give my fellow-citizens some idea of the appearance of the former Alcalde, Prefect, Mayor and Senator of Los Angeles.

But the most conspicuous man on Main street that day was of a different type. On our march, December, 1846, we were moving from the Black Water, just south of the present Mexican line, towards the San Pedro River. The snow was falling steadily, but it was not very cold. Our order of march was, with an advance guard of twenty men, and twenty pioneers with pick-axe and shovel, commanded by Capt. A. J. Smith, to remove any obstruction to our wagons. I was riding that day, with the colonel and surgeon, when we overtook the advance guard. The pioneers had been cutting down some mesquite trees that obstructed our way, and had just finished as we overtook them. Their officer gave the order "fall in, shoulder arms," and they formed in ranks of four, so that for about fifty yards we could not turn out to pass them. The right-hand man in the rear rank was at least six and a quarter feet tall. The crown of his hat was gone, and a shock of sandy hair, powdered by the falling snow, stuck out above the dilapidated rim, while a huge beard of the same color swept his breast. His upper garment had been a citizen's swallow-tailed coat, buttoned by a single button over his naked chest, but one of the tails had been cut off and sttched to his waistband, where it would do the most good, for decency's sake, and an old pair of No. 12 brogans, encased with rawhide, protected his feet. The right sleeve of the coat was gone, and his arm was bare from wrist to elbow, and, by way of uniform, the left leg of the pants was gone, leaving the leg bare from knee to ankle. His

underclothing had long since disappeared. But the way he marched and shouldered his musket, showed the drilled and veteran soldier. That ragged scarecrow had seen fifteen years' service in the British army, from the snows of Canada to the jungles of Burmah. The contrast between the soldierly bearing of the man and his dilapidated dress brought a smile to every face. After we had passed, the colonel pulled his long grey mustache, and said, "I never thought, when I left West Point, that I should ever command such a set of ragamuffins as these. But, poor fellows, it is not their fault; and better material for soldiers I never commanded." And that day, when I sat on my horse, where Ducommun's Block now rears its tall front, to see my old comrades march by, in the front rank of Company A, with cadenced step and martial mien, as he had marched in his younger days to the martial music of the regimental band, dressed in the scarlet uniform of a British grenadier, strode the old ragged veteran.